



Australian Bureau of Statistics

1002.0 - Australian Statistics Advisory Council - Annual Report, 2017-18

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Summary

Transmittal Letter

TRANSMITTAL LETTER

The Hon Stuart Robert MP
Assistant Treasurer
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Assistant Treasurer

I have pleasure in submitting the Australian Statistics Advisory Council's annual report for the year ending 30 June 2018.

The report outlines the work and activities of the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under subsection 24(1) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Annual Report is dated on the day I approved the text for printing.

Yours sincerely

Professor Gary Banks AO
Chairperson

20 September 2018

Australian Statistics Advisory Council - Mission

AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL - MISSION

To contribute to the effective development of Australia's statistical assets, by providing the Minister and the Statistician with independent, relevant and timely advice on national priorities.

Foreword

FOREWORD



The Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) has had another stimulating and productive year. Its discussions with, and advice to, the ABS covered such important matters as work program priorities, issues in conducting the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, the ongoing ABS Transformation Program and the remaking of the *Statistics Determination 1983*, which frames the capacity of the ABS to disclose information.

If I confine myself here to a single issue among those occupying the Council, the challenges and risks posed by the contraction of funding for the ABS is the one that stands out. Council members were sufficiently concerned by the impact of the ongoing reductions in the ABS's appropriation and the reliance on vulnerable 'user' funding, that it was agreed that I should bring this matter formally to the attention of the Minister. A letter was duly sent in February 2018, which shows why early supplementation of the ABS's resources has become an imperative (see Chairperson's Letter regarding ABS resourcing).

Among a number of positive developments during the year, the ABS's handling of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey was a highlight, with close attention to communication and implementation being rewarded with a relatively smooth process throughout and a high final response rate. Also, notwithstanding the well-recognised problems, the 2016 Census was found to have attained statistical reliability comparable to that of previous years. The Council is pleased that lessons from both experiences are being taken on board by the ABS in its early preparations for the 2021 Census.

At an operational level, the rotation of ASAC meetings between Canberra and the two largest capitals facilitated attendance and provided additional opportunities to engage with key players in these jurisdictions. And elevating the role of Council members' reports in the meeting agenda has yielded additional information and insights of benefit to the ABS and other members alike. The value of ASAC discussions and advice has also been enhanced by the seniority of appointments to the Council.

I sincerely thank Council members for their contributions and commitment over the past year, and the secretariat for its support. I would further like to record the Council's appreciation for the contribution of its departing Secretary, Phillip Gould, who was appointed to the new Office of the National Data Commissioner.

Professor Gary Banks AO
Chairperson

About ASAC

ABOUT ASAC

ASAC was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* (the ABS Act). Under subsection 18(1) of the ABS Act, the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- (a) *the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;*
- (b) *annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and*
- (c) *any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.*

Subsection 24(1) of the ABS Act provides that: *the Council must, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act.*

The ABS Act enables both the relevant Minister and the Australian Statistician to seek advice from the Council on these matters. The Australian Statistician keeps the Council informed of key developments related to the ABS. The Chairperson meets with the Minister and Australian Statistician as appropriate to ensure relevant advice and assistance from the Council are made available to them.

Role and operations of the Council

ASAC contributes to ABS decision-making about statistical priorities and helps inform its assessment of risks and appropriate strategies, as well as being an advocate for a national statistical system that is adequately resourced and effectively managed.

The ABS Act provides that the Council shall consist of a part-time Chairperson, the Australian Statistician (*ex officio*), and between ten and twenty-two part-time members, including a senior official from each State and Territory nominated by the Premier or Chief Minister. In addition, the Council includes representatives from academia, business and community sectors. Council members are appointed for their ability to identify emerging issues and needs and to be able to assist in promoting greater coordination nationally.

During 2017–18, the Ministers responsible for the ABS and ASAC were the Hon. Michael McCormack MP, until mid-December 2017 who was then succeeded by the Hon. Michael Sukkar MP, Assistant Minister to the Treasurer. The Minister appoints the Council Chairperson and members, for five and three years respectively. Members are eligible for reappointment when their terms expire.

As at 30 June 2018, the Council membership totalled eighteen, including the Chairperson, Gary Banks AO. The names and positions of those serving during the year are detailed in Membership of ASAC.

The Chairperson receives an annual fee as set by the Remuneration Tribunal, with other members serving in an honorary capacity. Members receive a prescribed travel allowance, where applicable, to support their attendance at meetings.

The Council meets in formal session three times a year, in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne (by rotation) as well as interacting out of session on specific matters requiring its attention.

Costs associated with the operations of ASAC are met from the ABS budget and secretariat services are provided, as part of their wider duties, by ABS staff. Until June 2018, the Office of ASAC Secretary was held for two years by Phillip Gould. He was replaced by Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Education, Crime and Culture Branch. Council secretariat services include arranging and supporting meetings, administering ASAC activities and membership, as well as assisting in the preparation of papers for the Council's consideration, its Annual Report and any submissions, correspondence or papers to be issued under its authority or that of the Chairperson.

A formal 'Statement of Intent' outlining the role of ASAC and its operations and priorities for 2018 was endorsed by members at the February 2018 meeting (see 2018 Statement of Intent). It contains a particular focus on: preparations for the 2021 Census; monitoring progress with the ABS Transformation and Data Integration initiatives, and managing within existing resourcing constraints so as to minimise the downside risks.

Year in Review: 2017-18

Year in Review: 2017-18

The Council held three meetings during 2017–18, in August and November 2017 and February 2018. (See Agenda for ASAC Meetings).

ABS Forward Work Program and Budget

The Council discussed the 2017–18 work program for the ABS and its performance against three strategic priorities:

- Maintaining the quality of official statistics – including through prioritisation of products under increasing budgetary constraints.
- Transforming the ABS to meet future needs and opportunities – including through the Statistical Business Transformation Program.
- Maximising the value of public data through data integration and improving microdata access – including implementation of the Data Integration Partnership for Australia.

ASAC provided advice to the ABS in relation to each of these three strategic priorities, as well as on appropriate strategies to manage increased risk without stifling innovation and collaboration. The Council concurred that National Accounts, the Consumer Price Index, Labour Force Statistics and Estimated Resident Population remain high priorities, for which there should be a low tolerance for risk.

Members noted challenges facing the ABS as it seeks to continue building the community's statistical literacy. They saw an increasing need to engage with social media in addition to traditional news sources.

As noted in last year's Annual Report, the Council has become increasingly concerned at the trend decline in ABS core funding and its implications for the range and quality of statistics it can provide, as well as for the ABS's coordination activities nationally. Information provided as background for its February 2018 meeting demonstrated that the resourcing and budgetary pressures were now placing the sustainability of key collections under threat. Members discussed the information provided on the funding profile, including projected reductions in appropriations, and noted the ABS's vulnerability to any diminution in user funding, particularly for key social statistics.

It was agreed by the Council that the Chairperson should write to the Minister explaining why supplementation of the ABS's resources has become an imperative and proposing some measures, including replacing user funding of nationally important social statistics with funding through the annual appropriation and either removing or staggering the ten per cent further budget reduction scheduled to coincide with completion of the 'transformation' investments. This letter was sent on 20 February 2018. (See Chairperson's Letter regarding ABS resourcing).

In the absence of additional funding, ASAC lent its support to the ABS's proposed prioritisation of statistical products, including the termination of some series and truncation of others.

2016 Census of Population and Housing

The Council noted with approval the successful release of the first round of data from the 2016 Census. This reflected in part the attention given to media access and briefings which served to improve the range and accuracy of reporting, with a particular focus on the quality of the data and valuable insights they provided into Australia's demographic trends.

The Council had strongly supported the Statistician's decision to convene an Independent Assurance Panel to assess the quality of the 2016 Census data. The Panel report, which was released publicly, confirmed that Census data were of comparable quality to previous censuses and remained 'fit-for-purpose'. ASAC agreed that the use of an assurance panel should become standard practice in future Censuses.

Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey

The ABS was issued a direction from the Australian Treasurer on 9 August 2017 to collect statistical information from electors on the question as to whether the law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry, a unique undertaking in the ABS's history. The ABS was asked to publish the results of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey (AMLPS) on 15 November 2017.

Given the national significance of this survey and the challenges it presented for the ABS, particularly in light of the tight timeframe and the backdrop of the 2016 Census, a special meeting of the Council was convened that included the Deputy Australian Statistician responsible for the AMLPS. The meeting canvassed a number of issues and strategies needed to minimise risks and enhance conduct of the Survey. Members provided guidance in such areas as risk management, survey methodology and governance. The Council also discussed with the ABS how best to manage engagement with Government and community stakeholder groups.

In addition, an effective media strategy was seen as key to maximising awareness of the survey and the approach being conducted, and thus to maximising participation.

In the event, the Council was pleased at the high response rate of nearly 80 per cent, unprecedented for a voluntary survey of this kind. Council members noted the timeliness of the survey, and the integrity with which it was conducted. The successful management of the survey was an important factor in the generally positive community perceptions. The Council also commended the ABS for continuing to deliver critical core work, despite diversion of staff.

2021 Census of Population and Housing

The Council has encouraged the ABS in its efforts to ensure that lessons from the 2016 Census and the AMLPS inform the approach to the 2021 Census, the planning for which is already under way. ASAC considers that a more robust framework has been established as a result, which should yield significant benefits.

ASAC members have raised various matters for ABS consideration, including: improving response rates from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; the importance of improving small area data; implementing assurance processes across the Census life cycle in addition to the Independent Assurance, and developing an effective communication strategy.

With several countries making significant use of administrative data to support Census operational processes and adjust for non-response, the ABS sought guidance from ASAC on its strategy to take some similar steps in the 2021 Census. While there is no legislative inhibition to the use of administrative data, the Council recommended undertaking wide-ranging public engagement in order to minimise scope for misinformation, should the ABS proceed in this direction.

Council members will continue to offer advice throughout the year in such areas as risk management, governance, partnerships, public engagement and communications.

Remaking the Statistics Determination

The *Statistics Determination 1983* (the Determination) enables the release or disclosure of certain statistical information, and therefore is of critical interest to ABS stakeholders and users. It is scheduled to 'sunset' on 1 October 2018. The Australian Treasury and ABS, with support from ASAC, have actively engaged with the community to facilitate the remaking of the Determination in an effective manner.

This has provided the ABS with an opportunity to consider whether the Determination remains fit for purpose, given the growing need for data to support research, innovation, policy and decision-making generally. The Council provided advice to the ABS on changes that could be made to the Determination, as well as on means of managing any public concerns about the release of personal information as a result of proposed changes.

Council members helped connect the ABS with the academic and business communities, through the Business Council of Australia, Australia Institute of Company Directors, and University of Sydney. ASAC stressed the need to build trust about how the Determination will affect the availability of data and that issues around consent in relation to de-identified data will be addressed.

The Data Integration Partnership for Australia

With the rapid growth of data integration globally, ASAC has long supported the ABS in its endeavour to better utilise existing public data, as part of its broader data integration program. The Council welcomed the Australian Government's announcement during the year that it would invest a total of \$130.8 million over three years to deliver the Data Integration Partnership for Australia (DIPA), of which the ABS will receive nearly \$38 million.

The Council retains a keen interest in the governance of the DIPA, while also advising the ABS on prioritisation of its broader data integration program. Members explored advancements in, and challenges facing, data integration, social licence and data sharing. The Council was supportive of the whole-of-government 'social licence' strategy to build trust in the digital agenda. It notes that the use and public benefits of this integrated data will need to be carefully communicated to ensure public confidence. Members advised the ABS on seeking opportunities to harness additional datasets and reduce respondent burden, as well as highlighting the value of small area data.

The Council welcomes the ABS's collaborative approach to the development of comprehensive longitudinal data assets – notably the *Multi-Agency Data Integration Project* (MADIP) (people centred) and *Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment* (BLADE) (business centred). ASAC supported the ABS's commissioning of an independent Privacy Impact Assessment on behalf of MADIP agencies in 2018, which demonstrated commitment to embedding privacy protections into the design of MADIP, a key step in building trust in MADIP and other Commonwealth data integration work.

ABS Transformation Agenda

Over the past year, ASAC has seen significant progress across all six dimensions of the ABS's Transformation program, which is resulting in gains in the efficiency and effectiveness of ABS operations and stakeholder relations. The Council has continued to provide specific advice on matters relating to governance, as well as infrastructure and cultural change dimensions of the program.

The Council has continued to monitor the progress of the Statistical Business Transformation Program (SBTP) noting that the November 2017 Gateway Review found an acceptable level of delivery. It understands that some benefits of the SBTP are already being realised; for example, through improved access to micro-data through the ABS's DataLab. Members acknowledged the importance of data integration at the unit record level, but stressed that a strategy may also be needed to develop user capabilities.

The Year Ahead: 2018-19

The Year Ahead: 2018-19

ABS Forward Work Program Prioritisation

The Council supports the broad priorities contained in the ABS's 2018–19 Forward Work Program,

namely:

- providing official statistics of high quality
- transforming the ABS to ensure its effectiveness into the future
- delivering new solutions to maximise the value of public data.

It is clear that the ABS must continue to adapt and innovate if it is to meet the changing needs of governments, business and the community in an increasingly constrained resource environment. Failing significant budgetary supplementation, how it chooses to allocate its diminishing resources will be critical to the public value it provides. Members will continue to lend support to the ABS in relation both to resourcing needs and the prioritisation decisions for statistics and infrastructure, noting that data integration and the use of administrative data have become key elements of the ABS's business model.

ASAC will also seek to assist the ABS in its development of strategies to manage risk in ways that avoid stifling innovation and collaboration. The Council accepts the need to continue assigning high priority and low tolerance for risk for such key economic statistics as the National Accounts, Consumer Price Index (CPI), Labour Force Statistics and Estimated Resident Population. ASAC is supportive of improvements in the measurement of the labour market – including the release of the first Annual and Quarterly Labour Accounts – and the development of new CPI sources and methods. The Council will engage with its member networks in relation to proposed unfunded work that it believes to be critical, such as moving to a monthly Consumer Price Index.

The Council will also continue to support the ABS in its ongoing efforts to balance the growing needs of stakeholders for access to statistics with legitimate privacy concerns, while meeting budgetary constraints and progressing the transformation program.

2021 Census of Population and Housing

As noted, significant progress has already been made by the ABS in preparing for the 2021 Census. The Council is pleased that learnings from the contrasting experiences of the 2016 Census and the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey are being incorporated in plans for the next Census.

Risk management, resourcing and technology will all require close attention and the Council will continue its discussions with the ABS and provide advice as appropriate. The Chair of the 2016 Census Independent Assurance Panel is also well placed to advise on risk mitigation. The Council notes that while the Australian Government has understandably indicated minimal appetite for risk in relation to this Census, this has significant funding implications which currently are not reflected in the (slightly reduced) budget for the Census.

ASAC has also provided early input to the ABS on Census topics and their prioritisation. Members have emphasised the importance of keeping the Census focused on those areas for which information is required that cannot otherwise be obtained reliably. ASAC will provide further advice on an interim position paper setting out proposed Census topics, which it understands will be released for consultation in November 2018. The Council will also provide advice with respect to the final topic recommendations to Government.

Reform of Australia's Statistical System

Progressing a range of reforms to Australia's statistical system remains a core focus for the Council. Members welcomed the Australian Government's announcement that it would invest \$65 million over four years to implement recommendations from the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Data Availability and Use and reform Australia's data system.

Following the recent establishment of the Office of the National Data Commissioner (NDC), which has the role of implementing and overseeing a new data sharing and release framework, ASAC will continue to champion the wider reform of Australia's statistical system. The ABS has been

commissioned to provide technical advice and assistance to the NDC and the Council will continue to offer guidance on strengthening safeguards around the integrity, management and use of government-held data. It will also closely monitor and contribute, where possible, to NDC initiatives, including the Data Sharing and Release Legislation.

The Council recognises the need to:

- achieve legislative reform to regulate digital data to enable better sharing and release of data
- apply a risk-based approach to data sharing and release
- identify, and invest in, high-value or nationally significant datasets
- implement data management standards to support increased data availability and use.

Chairperson's Letter regarding ABS resourcing

CHAIRPERSON'S LETTER REGARDING ABS RESOURCING



ABS House, 45 Benjamin Way
Belconnen ACT 2617

Locked Bag 10
Belconnen ACT 2616

Telephone: (02) 6252 5315
Email: asac@abs.gov.au

Hon Michael Sukkar MP
Assistant Minister to the Treasurer
Member for Deakin, Victoria
PO Box 232
MITCHAM VIC 3132

cc: Hon Scott Morrison MP, Treasurer
Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann, Minister for Finance
Mr David W. Kalisch, Australian Statistician

Dear Minister

Congratulations on being assigned responsibility for the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC). I look forward to meeting you when convenient to tell you about the role and work of ASAC.

My purpose in writing now is to alert you to concerns, formed over the twelve months that I have been Chairperson of ASAC, about deficiencies in the resourcing of the ABS and the impact these are having on its potential contribution to the Australian community. These concerns were crystallised in a meeting of the Council last week, part of the agenda of which was devoted to this issue.

As you well know, Australia's society and economy have been changing at an unprecedented pace. Capturing these changes in a systematic way through national statistical collections is increasingly vital to government, business and the community. The ABS is the pre-eminent independent public institution providing the statistical infrastructure and essential data on which Australians rely. If anything, recent trends in social media have heightened the value of the Bureau's authoritative statistics.

While budgetary restraint obviously remains necessary across the public sector, ongoing reductions to the ABS's appropriation, including through uniformly applied 'efficiency dividends', are jeopardising key statistical assets and curtailing opportunities for valuable data enhancements.

This is not to deny the importance of productivity improvements and obtaining maximum value from taxpayer funds. It is clear that the ABS recognises the importance of enhancing organisational efficiency: over the years it has identified and implemented significant budgetary savings. But there are inherent limits to productivity gains for public institutions such as the ABS that rely intensively on human capital; at some point, quality inevitably falls with funding. And short-term budgetary gains can prove deleterious in the longer term. True productivity gains come from getting more output from the same inputs, not less from less.

The evidence bears out that the ABS is a comparatively low-cost organisation. And by international standards it is currently funded at a significantly lower level than the national statistical agencies of comparable countries (see Appendix).

Notwithstanding the commitment shown to making operational savings and, where feasible, obtaining user-funding for specific collections, real declines in its annual appropriation have reached the point where the ABS has had to terminate or curtail statistical series. There are no programs left that do not meet strong community needs. Any further rationalisation will threaten core national statistical assets over the next 2-3 years, including key economic indicators.

It is therefore important that achieving sustainable funding for the ABS become a priority for Government in its budget deliberations and other funding decisions. The *Functional and Efficiency* Review of the ABS conducted in 2016 by David Tune AO, former secretary of the Department of Finance, independently confirmed the need to place the resourcing of the ABS on a more sustainable footing. It considered that if the ABS cannot maintain the continuity and quality of its core statistics, public trust in the institution and its statistical services will be eroded.

I recognise that significant funds have recently been made available for what is known as the 'ABS transformation agenda' – involving investments essential to maintaining its viability – as well as for the 'Data Integration Partnership for Australia'. The Government is to be commended for this. However, I understand that transformation expenditures have had to be met in part from within the ABS appropriation, further compounding budgetary pressures. Moreover, while these investments can be expected to yield a good return over time, the requirement that the ABS deliver an immediate 10% budgetary saving in 2020-21 poses a significant challenge.

The majority of social statistics produced by the ABS now rely on user funding, the bulk of which comes from Commonwealth departments. Such collections are increasingly vulnerable, given these departments' own budgetary pressures. Providing public funding directly to the ABS through its annual appropriation would bring much-needed stability to these nationally important collections.

Moreover, while there is clearly a place for user funding of certain statistics, public sector staffing rules have prevented any such additional funds being drawn on to employ extra staff needed to produce requested data. This has compounded the pressures on the ABS arising from decreased central funding. (I understand, however, that there has been useful engagement with the Bureau on this issue.)

In addition to increased demands for data, there is a need for greater coherence in the data that are being produced across governments within our Federation. The ABS has played a useful coordinating and advisory role in the past (leading the National Statistical Service) but budgetary constraints have obliged it to step away from this important work, including much of its support for state/territory statistical requirements. The consequent loss of national statistical capability is clearly contrary to what we should be striving to achieve.

In short, I believe that early supplementation of the ABS's resources has become an imperative.

In particular, following discussions with Council, I recommend that the Government provide additional funding to the ABS to allow further improvements in the measurement of labour force and productivity (without having to make offsetting cutbacks elsewhere). In addition, the ABS should be funded directly to undertake collections of essential social statistics, rather than relying on funding through

government agencies. I would also encourage the Government to reconsider the (ongoing) ten per cent budget cut on completion of the 'transformation' investments, or at least allow any savings to be delivered over time in line with realised benefits.

I look forward to meeting you and would be happy to respond to any questions you may have on these important matters.

Best wishes,

Gary Banks.

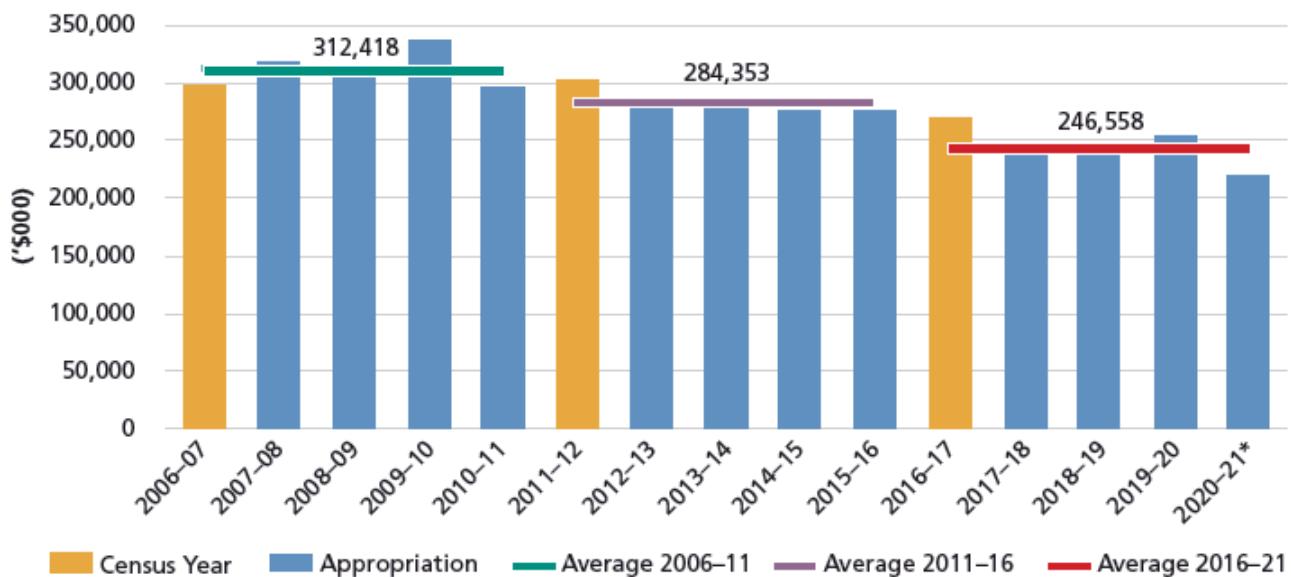
Prof Gary Banks AO
Chairperson
Australian Statistics Advisory Council

20 February 2018

APPENDIX : The ABS funding position in two charts

The ABS's appropriation is reducing in real terms due to continuing efficiency dividends, whole-of-government savings and reduction in new policy proposals over the years.

ABS Funding Profile - Constant Terms
(Excluding Census, SBTP and Departmental Capital Budget)



* First year of an additional 10% reduction in the ABS appropriation

The 2016 *Functional and Efficiency Review* of the ABS revealed that its appropriation as a proportion of national budget funding is significantly lower than for national statistical organisations in comparable countries.

Percentage of 2014-15 national budget provided to national statistics bodies



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2015; Department of Finance Canada, 2015; Statistics New Zealand, 2015; The Treasury, 2015a; The Treasury, 2016c; The Treasury New Zealand, 2016

Membership of ASAC

Membership of ASAC as at 30 June 2018

Member	Date first appointed
Professor Gary Banks AO Professorial Fellow Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research	28 February 2017
Mr David W. Kalisch Australian Statistician (ex-officio) Australian Bureau of Statistics	15 December 2014
Mr David Byers Interim Chief Executive Minerals Council of Australia	30 April 2018
Professor Deborah Cobb-Clark Professor of Economics University of Sydney	2 November 2015
Dr Luci Ellis Assistant Governor (Economic) Reserve Bank of Australia	2 November 2015
Ms Lisa Groppe Chief Economist Business Council of Australia	2 November 2015
Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM Pro Vice Chancellor Engagement and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Western Sydney University	8 April 2013
Professor Abigail Payne Director and Ronald Henderson Professor Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research	30 April 2018
Mr Nigel Ray PSM Deputy Secretary, Macroeconomic Group The Treasury	2 November 2015
Professor Judith Sloan Contributing Economics Editor The Australian	2 November 2015
Mr Stephen Walters Chief Economist Australian Institute of Company Directors	2 November 2015

State/Territory Member

Dr Caralee McLiesh PSM Deputy Secretary, Fiscal and Economic Group New South Wales Treasury	19 December 2016
Ms Amy Auster Deputy Secretary, Economic Division Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance	23 March 2017
Mr Antony Skinner Queensland Government Statistician Queensland Treasury	8 April 2013
Mr Kurt Sibma Director, Data Analytics and Services Redesign Branch Western Australian Department of Treasury	9 July 2015
Mr Chris McGowan Director, Intergovernmental Relations South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet	23 May 2011
Mr Anton Voss Deputy Secretary, Economic and Financial Policy Division Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance	14 July 2014
Mr Stephen Miners Deputy Under Treasurer, Economic, Budget and Industrial Relations Australian Capital Territory Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	8 June 2018

Changes in Membership in 2017-18

The following were appointed to the Council during 2017-18:

- Mr David Byers
- Professor Abigail Payne
- Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM*
- Mr Stephen Miners

* Professor Jackson Pulver was reappointed as a member of the Council.

The Council farewelled two members during the year:

- Ms Kathy Goth from the ACT completed her term in September 2017.
- Mr Craig Graham from the NT, who joined the Council in April 2016, resigned in May 2018.*

* Mr David Braines-Mead was appointed to the Council on 3 July 2018 to replace Mr Graham.

2018 ASAC Statement of Intent

2018 ASAC Statement of Intent

Purpose and Role of ASAC

1 The Australian Statistical Advisory Council (ASAC) was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* (the ABS Act).

The ABS Act (section 18) states that:

(1) The functions of the Council are to advise the Minister and the Statistician in relation to:

- (a) the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;
- (b) annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and
- (c) any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.

(2) Either the Minister or the Statistician, or both of them, may refer matters of the kind referred to in subsection (1) to the Council for the purpose of seeking the advice of the Council in relation to those matters.

2 In line with its legislated functions, ASAC will represent government and community interests by advising the Minister and the Australian Statistician on Australia's current and longer-term statistical priorities and how the ABS work program can deliver on them.

3 As an advisory forum to the ABS with broad membership and understanding of the wider environment, ASAC will:

- Advise the Minister and the ABS in relation to the ABS's functions
- Provide input into the strategic directions, risks, priorities and key deliverables of the ABS
- Advocate for an effective national statistical system and support the ABS's role within it
- Report annually to Parliament.

4 To help the ABS respond to issues and plan for the future, ASAC will:

- Provide the ABS with frank advice and feedback
- Draw on the expertise of ASAC members and seek input from stakeholders
- Raise risks and identify potential issues
- Provide guidance to ensure the ABS remains a trusted and relevant data provider.

5 The Chairperson of ASAC will convey advice to the Minister and report back at ASAC meetings.

6 ASAC's membership is balanced to ensure varied community and government representation while remaining of a manageable size. Members are appointed for their ability to identify emerging needs and promote the value of data and its coordination within and across jurisdictions and sectors. They will have the seniority to navigate and help influence the decision-making environment and, by understanding the key aspects and drivers of the statistical system, will ensure the Council retains a strategic focus.

Priorities for 2018

- **Preparation for 2021 Census** – content of the Census to be re-examined as topics have remained unchanged since the 2011 Census; the Council can assist both in suggesting and reviewing potential changes, as well as advising on managing public expectations and input.
- **ABS transformation** – provision of ongoing monitoring and advice to ensure that goals are

realised for both the Statistical Business Transformation Program and broader transformation activities.

- **Data integration and access** - advise on data integration activities that can improve the national evidence base for decision-making, and on the ABS's role in the Data Integration Partnership for Australia. ASAC to help promote the benefits of this work. ASAC may also advise on issues for the ABS raised by the Government's response to the Productivity Commission report on Data Availability and Use.
- **Resourcing key collections** – ASAC's 2016-17 Annual Report noted the risks to ABS national collections posed by current funding arrangements. ASAC to provide guidance to the Minister/Government and the ABS about key statistical collections and resourcing implications.

2018 Directions

1 Three face-to-face meetings are planned for 2018, with further opportunities for engagement as required between meetings. In addition to the Canberra meeting in February, meetings will be held in Melbourne (August) and Sydney (November).

2 In line with requirements prescribed in subsection 24(1) of the ABS Act, ASAC will continue to provide an annual report to the Minister.

Agenda for ASAC Meetings

Agenda for ASAC Meetings

Meeting Agenda – 3 August 2017

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Statistician's Report
3. Members' Reports
4. Census Update
5. Statistics Determination
6. ABS Involvement in Whole of Government Data Integration Initiatives
7. Other Business

Meeting Agenda – 22 November 2017

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Statistician's Report
3. Members' Reports
4. Transformation Update
5. Public Sector Data: Social Licence
6. ABS Data Integration Priorities
7. ASAC Priorities
8. Other Business

Meeting Agenda – 14 February 2018

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Statistician's Report
3. Members' Reports
4. ABS Resourcing and Budget
5. Update on Remaking the Statistics Determination
6. 2021 Census Update
7. ASAC Priorities 2018

8. Other Business

Freedom of Information

Freedom of Information

In accordance with section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, details of the structure and functions of ASAC and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by the Council are outlined below.

Establishment, organisation and functions

For information regarding the establishment, organisation and function of ASAC, see About ASAC.

Powers

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. The Council does not administer any enactments or schemes.

Arrangements for outside participation

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS to ensure a broad range of views and interests are reflected in the advice that the Council offers to the Minister and the Australian Statistician. For membership details, see Membership of ASAC.

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government administration may contribute matters for the Council's consideration by making representations to the Minister or the ASAC Chairperson on matters of concern. Contributions can be directed in writing to the ASAC Secretary at the address below.

Information available

The ASAC Annual Report, which is tabled in Parliament, is available from ABS offices, and on the ASAC and ABS websites. The ABS maintains records, on behalf of ASAC, relating to: the administration of the Council; papers discussed at Council meetings; summary records of meeting proceedings; and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

Feedback and enquiries

ASAC welcomes feedback on this report. Feedback or enquiries related to accessing ASAC documents, including enquiries under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, may be directed in writing (by post or email) to:

Secretary
Australian Statistics Advisory Council
c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics
Locked Bag 10
Belconnen ACT 2616

Email: asac@abs.gov.au

About this Release

Outlines the functions of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council and describes the activities undertaken by the Council to discharge its responsibilities during 2016-17

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